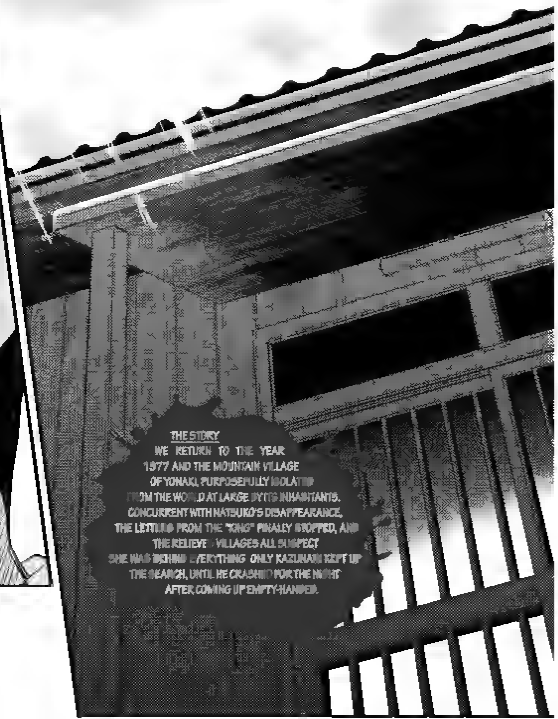
SUNDAY
AUGUST 15,
8:46 A.M.

KAZU-
NARI-KUN,
WAKE UP.
...
TSU-
KO?
EVERY-
ONE'S AT
THE
MEETING
HALL.
LURCH
NATSUKO...
TOO?

CHAPTER 16

KING'S GAME ORIGIN

STORY BY [illegible] KANAZAWA ART BY J-TA [illegible]



THE STORY

WE RETURN TO THE YEAR 1977 AND THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE OF YONAKI, PURPOSEFULLY ISOLATED FROM THE WORLD AT LARGE BY ITS INHABITANTS. CONCURRENT WITH NATSUKO'S DISAPPEARANCE, THE LETTERS FROM THE "KING" FINALLY STOPPED, AND THE RELIEVED VILLAGERS ALL SUSPECT SHE WAS BEHIND EVERYTHING. ONLY KAZUNARI KEPT UP THE SEARCH, UNTIL HE CRASHED FOR THE NIGHT AFTER COMING UP EMPTY-HANDED.

RYUUJI!
YO!
NOT 100%..
...BUT PRETTY MUCH.
YOU'RE ALL HEALED?!
I CAN AT LEAST WALK ON MY OWN NOW
I'LL NEVER GO NEAR A GIANT HORNET'S NEST AGAIN FOR AS LONG AS I LIVE
HAHA
OH...
THANK GOD--
HEH

I CAN'T GET MY GORGEOUS MANE TAMED WITH THESE STUPID BANDAGES IN THE WAY. SHAME, HUH?
HMPH!
HE'S STILL NOT
...BACK TO NORMAL, THOUGH.
HEH HEH
RYUUJI...
ANYWAY..
I HEARD NATSUKO IS MISSING NOW?

MAN, YOU'VE HAD IT ROUGH TOO, HUH?
YEAH... TWO DAYS AGO.
I'VE LOOKED EVERY-WHERE, BUT NO LUCK.
WELL, DON'T PUSH YOUR-SELF.
THOSE ARE SOME KILLER BAGS UNDER YOUR EYES!
STEP
I'M JUST A LITTLE WORN OUT. YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND—
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.

SAME THING.
NO SIGN OF ANY LETTERS FROM THE KING TODAY.
THEN...

TWO DAYS WITH NO LETTERS.. THAT HAS TO BE IT, RIGHT?
THEN THE KING'S GAME ..
...MUST BE OVER.
MURMUR
MURMUR
WE CAN'T BE CERTAIN YET..
.. BUT I BELIEVE SO
WE WANT TO KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS FOR A FEW MORE DAYS, UNTIL WE'RE CLEAR ON EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED.
EXCUSE ME, DOUJIMA-SAN.

THEY'RE JUST OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE.
AT LEAST LET MY BROTHER YUUJI GO TO THEM
DOES THAT MEAN WE CAN SEE OUR PARENTS NOW?
SIS...
I APOLOGIZE..
...BUT YOU'LL NEED TO WAIT UNTIL THE GOV-ERNMENT PERMITS IT.
WHY?
WE OON'T EVEN NEED TO LEAVE THE VILLAGE

SOME OF THE SCIENTISTS ARE AGAINST IT.
THEY SAY WE SHOULD AVOID CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD FOR NOW.
CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE?
YOU MEAN US?
YEAH.. SO...
ANYWAY
JUST HANG IN THERE UNTIL WE'RE CERTAIN THAT THE KING'S GAME IS OVER.

A WEEK..
...BUT WITHIN A WEEK, I'M SURE
I CAN'T GIVE AN EXACT NUMBER...
HOW LONG WILL THAT TAKE?
CERTAIN...
I PREDICT THAT THE KING...
...WON'T BE SENDING ANY MORE LETTERS.
SHUUHEI-SAN.
IT'S OKAY, SANAE-SAN.

BUT WE'LL HAVE TO TOUGH IT OUT.
I KNOW YOU'RE WORIED ABOUT YUUJI...
WE JUST NEED TO WAIT UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT'S SATISFIED.
MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR

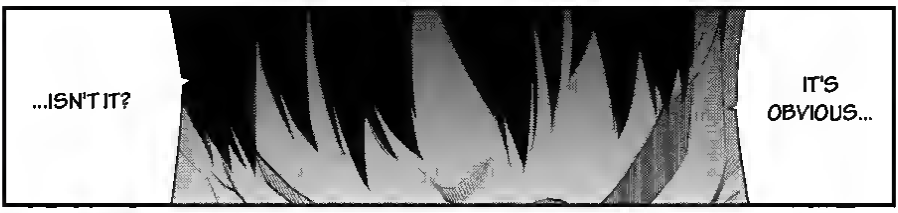
Y-YEAH ...
I GUESS A WEEK'S OKAY.
WHY NOT TRY TO THINK OF IT AS A LITTLE SUMMER VACATION!

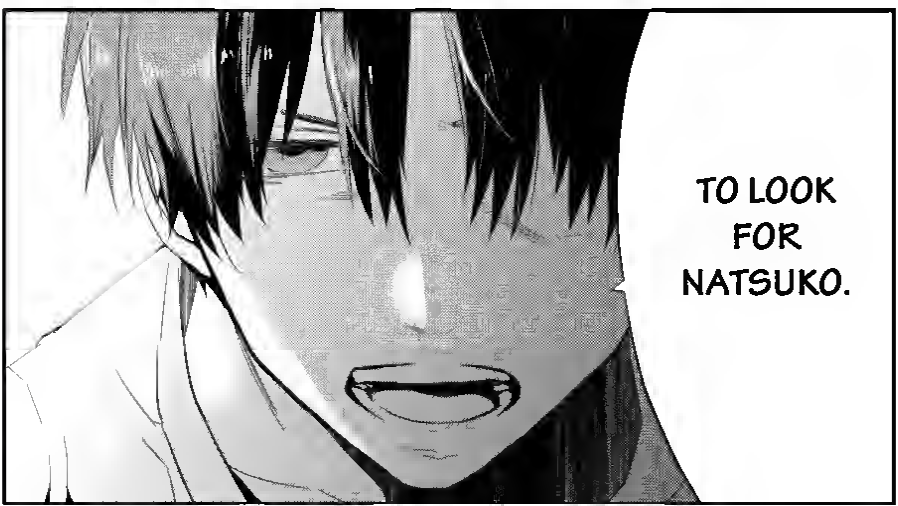
A FEW DAYS AGO...
...SHUUHEI-SAN WAS TERRIFIED.
LIKE HE WAS HAVING A MENTAL BREAK-DOWN.
BUT NOW HE'S BACK TO NORMAL.
HE DEFINITELY BELIEVES NATSUKO WAS THE KING.
AND THE FACT THAT SHE DISAPPEARED IS WHY THE GAME IS OVER.
GRIT

AND NOT JUST HIM!
ATSUSHI-SAN, KOUJI-SAN...
ALL OF THEM!
DAMN IT...
WHAT THE HELL?!

NATSUKO'S STILL LOST, DAMN IT!
THEY ALL ONLY CARE ABOUT THEMSELVES!
WHAT'S WORSE...
THEY THINK SHE DID ALL THIS!
SHFF

WHERE'RE YOU GOING, KAZUNARI-KUN?


...ISN'T IT?
IT'S OBVIOUS...


TO LOOK FOR NATSUKO.

ALL RIGHT, PROMISE ME THIS.
YOU'LL COME BACK HERE TO SLEEP..
AND STAY AWAY FROM THE MOUNTAINS AT NIGHT.
THERE'S NO POINT IN HANGING AROUND HERE.
I SUPPOSE THERE'S NO STOPPING YOU, IS THERE?
HRMM...
...AND IF I DON'T COMPLY?
HOW CAN I ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING LIKE THAT?!
SCOWL
AGREE TO THAT AND I'LL ALLOW YOU TO GO.

NGH—!
FINE.
I'LL BE BACK BEFORE NIGHTFALL!
SHFF
CLENCH
THEN I'LL HAVE YOU DETAINED
WE'RE STILL THE POLICE, REMEMBER.

SHIT!
YOU IDIOTS WATCHED THE VILLAGE GET SLAUGHTERED WITHOUT EVER COMING CLOSE TO THE KING!
WIPE
HEY YOU—
STOMP
STOMP
SAME THING THAT DAY...
NO SIGN OF NATSUKO.
SIR—!

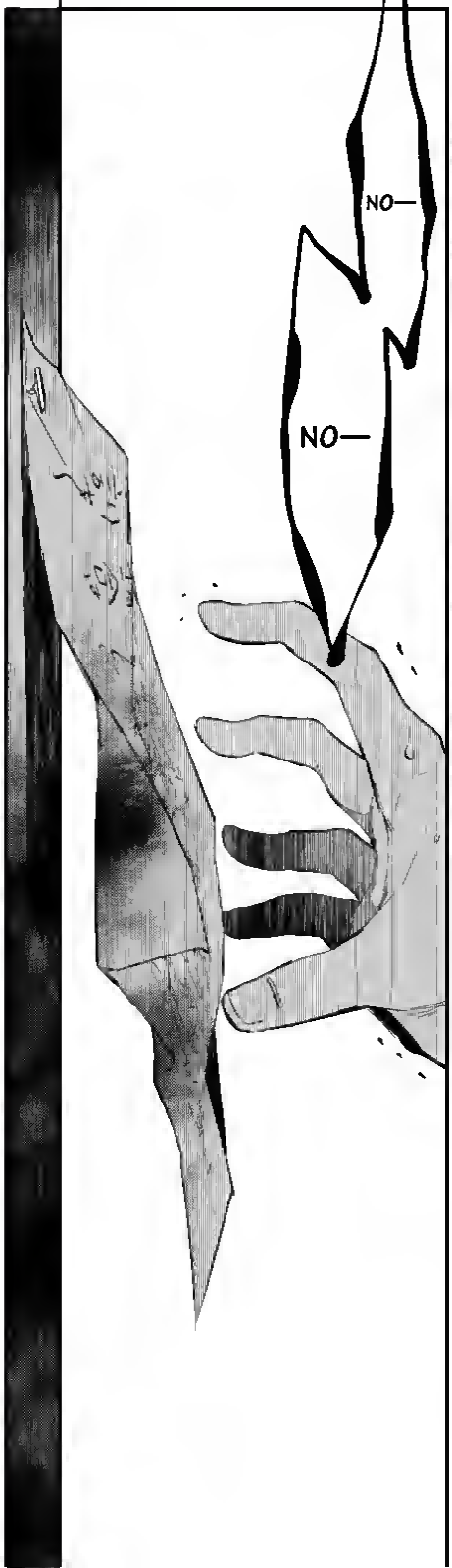
FOUR WHOLE DAYS WITH NO LETTER FROM THE KING.
MAYBE THE KING'S GAME REALLY IS OVER.
しーん
NO ONE WILL SAYS ANY-THING AROUND ME...
. BUT OBVIOUSLY THEY ALL THINK IT WAS NATSUKO
RUMMAGE
EVEN YUUJI AND RYUUJI, HER CLOSEST FRIENDS
..ARE DOUBTING HER, JUST BECAUSE HER DISAPPEARANCE HAPPENED TO COINCIDE WITH THE LETTERS STOPPING

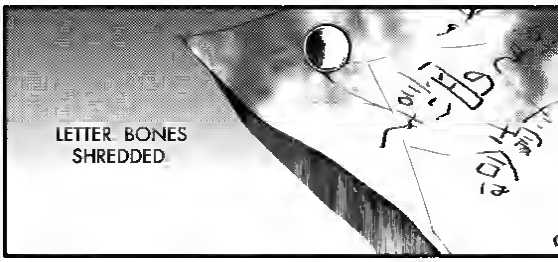
FRIDAY AUGUST 19, 5:25 A.M.

SHE'S ALREADY
MAYBE
DEAD.
BUT NO MATTER WHERE I LOOK, THERE'S NO SIGN OF HER.
NOT ME.
I BELIEVE IN HER.
NATSUKO...
SHAKE
SHAKE
NO, NO, NO, SHE'S HIDING.
"THE KING'S GAME"...
FLUTTER
"IT'S SAFE NOW."
I JUST NEED TO TELL HER.

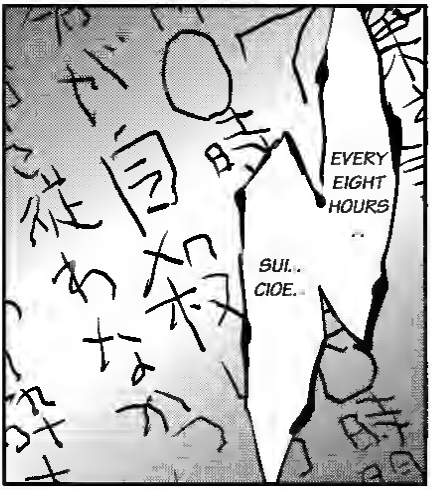
LETTER: THIS IS THE KING'S GAME. ALL VILLAGERS ARE PARTICIPATING. THE KING'S ORDERS ARE ABSOLUTE. PLEASE CARRY THEM OUT BY THE END OF AUGUST 19TH.

PARTICIPANTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO QUIT.


NO—
NO—


LETTER BONES
SHREDDED

THERE HAVEN'T BEEN ANY IN DAYS!
THE KING'S ORDERS ARE ABSOLUTE. PLEASE CARRY THEM OUT BY THE END OF AUGUST 19TH. PARTICIPANTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO QUIT.
ORDER 7: STARTING AT MIDNIGHT ONE PERSON MUST COMMIT SUICIDE EVERY EIGHT HOURS. IF THE ORDER IS NOT FOLLOWED, ONE RANDOM PERSON WILL BE PUNISHED BY HAVING THEIR BONES SHREDDED.
WHY...


EVERY EIGHT HOURS..
SUI.. CIDE..

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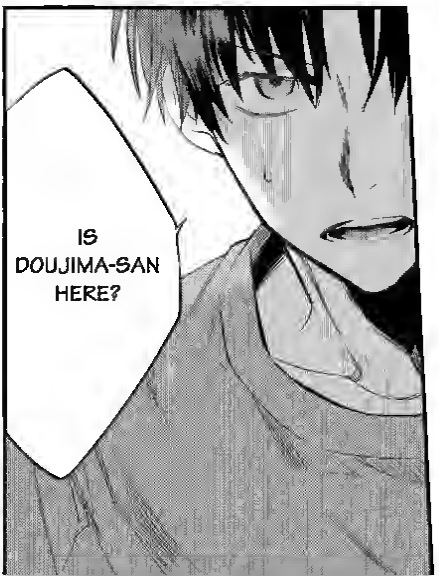
IS DOUJIMA-SAN HERE?

THAT MEANS THREE PEOPLE ARE GUARANTEED TO DIE!

.....
THE BULLETIN BOARD...
BULLETIN BOARD? WHAT ABOUT IT?
GRRZZ...
IS IT AN EMERGENCY? HE'S TAKING A NAP RIGHT NOW
HE'LL PROBABLY BE UP AROUND EIGHT O'CLOCK.
WHY WASN'T ANYONE WATCHING THE BULLETIN BOARD?
O-OH...
WELL, IT'S BEEN FIVE DAYS SINCE THE KING'S LETTERS STOPPED..
...SO INSTEAD OF POSTING A GUARD AT EVERY SPOT WE SWITCHED TO DOING PATROLS.
TCHI

WHY DO YOU ASK?
BECAUSE I JUST FOUND THIS TACKED TO IT A FEW MINUTES AGO.
HUH?
WHAT'S—
GIVE IT TO DOUJIMA-SAN, PLEASE.
SHOVE
SHIVER
HUH?!

MAYBE YOU SHOULD WAKE HIM UP?
I THINK THIS QUALIFIES... AS AN EMERGENCY.
JUST WAIT RIGHT THERE!
Y-YEAH!
DASH
SLAM

...THAT'S ALL THE LETTER SAYS.

THE HANDWRITING ANALYSIS HASN'T COME BACK YET...
...BUT THEY'RE ALREADY SAYING IT LOOKS THE SAME AS THE PREVIOUS LETTERS.
THIS... THIS CAN'T BE.
THE KING'S GAME... WAS SUPPOSED TO BE FINISHED.
IMPOSSIBLE... IMPOSSIBLE...!

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO CALM DOWN?!
CALM?
CALM DOWN NOW, SHUUHEI-SAN
...THEN WITHIN THE HOUR ...
IF THIS IS REAL...
...THE KING'S GOING TO KILL ONE OF US BY SHREDDING OUR BONES!

LIAR!
NO, SHUUHEI-SAN.
IS THIS SOME KIND OF SICK JOKE?
HEY.. KAZU-NARI.
YOU FOUND THIS ONE, RIGHT?
ZOD
YOU'RE TRYING TO FRIGHTEN US...
...BECAUSE WE ACCUSED NATSUKO OF BEING THE KING!
TELL ME THAT'S WHY!
KAZU-NARI!